

Credential Glossary

This glossary¹ was developed to define terms specifically related to Gateways credentials. It may be a useful tool to practitioners in the credential process, and in understanding specific credential requirements.

Accreditation Standards	A set of scorable, nationally-recognized essential requirements of excellence, used as a basis for judgment for the purpose of measuring a high quality program.
Administrative Experience	Experience supervising staff and overseeing operation and facilities management within the field of early childhood, school-age, and youth development.
Administrator	A person in a leadership position who oversees operation and facilities management and may supervise staff.
Advocacy	Active support of an idea or cause—the pursuit of influencing outcomes, including public-policy and resource allocation decisions within a political, economic, and social system.
Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Act	A legal mandate, enacted by the US Congress in 1990, which makes it illegal to discriminate against children and adults with disabilities and other special needs in all settings regardless of age. For more information about the ADA Act, visit: www.ada.gov .
Anecdotal Observations	Directly observed occurrences that are clearly and concisely written in a nonjudgmental manner in the past tense, including a factual account of a single incident answering the who, what, where, when, and how of the incident.
Area of Specialized Expertise	Having in-depth knowledge in a specific area, such as infant toddler, staff development, observation and assessment, school-age care, etc.
Assessment	A method of (1) evaluating a child’s developmental or education progress that is based on sound research, (2) organizing principles about young children’s learning and development, and (3) meeting accepted professional standards of validity and reliability.
Benchmarks	Descriptions that serve as a standard of comparison for evaluation or assessment of quality.
Business Administration Scale (BAS)	A research-based, ten-item scale that is used to measure and improve the quality of business and professional practices in the family child care programs. BAS application allows for program self-assessment and improvement planning.

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Business Plan	A formal statement of a set of business goals (financial and operational) including: needs of a specific program(s), reasons why the goals are selected, reasons why the goals are believed to be attainable, resources available to meet those goals, and the desired outcomes.
Child Care Professional (CCP) Credential	An entry-level national credential awarded to early childhood development practitioners, by the National Child Care Association (NCCA), who exhibit basic knowledge and skill in 15 professional ability areas and meet the requirements of the credential.
Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act (CANRA)	An Act that requires certain professionals known as mandated reporters, to report known or suspected instances of child abuse or neglect to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (IDCFS). For more information about CANRA visit: www.state.il.us/dcfs/child/index.shtml .
Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agency	Community organizations—including 16 within the state of Illinois—that are partially state funded agencies, offering the following core services: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Maintenance of a database of all types of child care in the community; 2) Provision of child care counseling and referrals for parents as well as assistance in paying for child care; 3) Development of new child care resources (new centers and homes); 4) Provision of technical assistance and training for child care providers as well as educational scholarship and funding for professional development; and 5) Analysis of child care supply and demand data.
Child Development Associate (CDA)	An entry-level national credential awarded to infant/toddler and early childhood development practitioners, by the National Council for Early Child Professional Recognition, who exhibit basic knowledge and skill by obtaining a minimum of ten hours of training in each of the designated eight content areas, and by meeting the requirements of the portfolio and the credential.
Children’s Mental Health	The capacity of children to experience, regulate, and express emotions; form close and secure interpersonal relationships; and explore the environment and learn. Children’s mental health is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development, and also refers to the mental wellness of the actual care-giving relationships between caregiver and child.
Code of Ethics	Standards of conduct for the professional (by NAA, NAEYC, etc.) that are a resource to assist the professional in understanding the ethical responsibilities inherent in providing programs for children and youth. A “code of ethics” is sometimes referred to as a “code of conduct.”
Community Forum	An organized meeting allowing the public to learn more about, and give input on a specific topic.
Community Service Agencies	Local organizations that provide resources or services that support children and families, such as counseling, social work, recreation, child care, or similar services.

Competencies	Measurable statements of knowledge, dispositions, and observable skills that practitioners working with children and youth need to facilitate learning and development linked to relevant guidelines or standards.
Content Disciplines	Areas of instruction regarding a specific subject-matter, such as math, science, etc.
Credential Approved Training	A training considered by Gateways to Opportunity, as meeting at least 0.5 point toward a Gateways credential. This training consists of at least 7.5 clock-hours of content in one Gateways Content Area, including an evaluation component.
Culturally Appropriate	Program practices, interactions, and learning materials that support, relate, and address the customary beliefs, social norms, and characteristics of a racial, cultural, linguistic, religious, or social group.
Culturally Appropriate Assessment	An assessment that is designed and applied in a way that is sensitive to cultural- and linguistic-diversity and to the special needs of children with disabilities.
Developmental Domains	Describes different areas of a child’s development (e.g., cognitive, physical, language, and social-emotional).
Developmental Screenings	A tool designed to identify children who are in need of further evaluation for possible developmental delays.
Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)	Meeting children where they are and enabling them to reach goals that are both challenging and achievable. This perspective of practice is age-, individually-, culturally-, and developmentally-appropriate. It ensures that goals and experiences are suited to children’s learning and development, and challenging enough to promote their progress and interest (refer to NAEYC’s book <i>Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8</i> , Third Edition).
Director	Administrator of a program.
Dispositions	A tendency to exhibit frequently, consciously, and voluntarily a pattern of behavior that is directed to a broad goal (e.g., to be an independent learner, reader, curious, etc.).
Dissertation	A formal written document advancing a new point of view resulting from research; usually a requirement for an advanced academic degree.
Diversity	Differences in human existence that are important to children’s development and family functioning. Diversity is a generic term used to address a range of variations in language, culture, religion, race and ethnicity, ability, socioeconomics, gender, or sexual orientation.
Documented Work Experience	Verified employment at a specific organization, including: position held and number of hours worked (refer to the <i>Teaching & Work Experience Verification Form</i>).

Early Childhood	Generic term used to describe the field of early care and education of children birth through age 8.
Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R)	A research-based 43-item assessment scale that measures and improves the global quality of a preschool classroom’s learning environment in seven subscale areas of care-giving practice. It is designed for use in classrooms for groups of children 2.5 through age 5. ECERS application allows for program self-assessment and improvement planning.
ECE Credential	A voluntary credential awarded at multiple levels that identifies what individuals working directly with young children birth through age 8 should know and be able to demonstrate at various levels of training, education, and experience.
Electronic Etiquette	Respectful use of electronic technology that communicates in a clear and professional manner.
Emerging Principles	Refers to newly formed principles or variations of existing principles of best practice that are put in place as programs and practitioners adapt to the changing needs of children and families.
Emotional Health	The ability to understand others and express one’s own emotions appropriately.
English Language Learners (ELLs)	Children who speak a primary language(s) other than English at home and are actively learning English.
Environmental Psychology	How the design of the in- and outdoor environment impacts the well-being and behavior of children (e.g., wall color, allocation of quiet space, etc.).
Ethical Standards	Principles guided by the profession (NAA, NAEYC, etc.), which ensure integrity and promote values such as trust, good behavior, and fairness.
Facilitation Styles	Purposeful techniques used by a meeting organizer or leaders in a group setting to encourage individual participation and communication within the group.
Family	A social unit consisting of one or more adults together with the children they care for.
Family and Community Contexts	The concept that children and families do not exist in a vacuum, but are part of a larger group, whether it be physical (such as a neighborhood) or social (such as sharing a common language, religion, or culture). To effectively work with children, one must understand the child’s unique family and the wider communities that the family exists in.
Family Child Care Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (FCCERS-R)	A research-based 38-item assessment scale that measures and improves the global quality of family child care learning environments in seven subscale areas of care-giving practice: space and furnishing, personal care routines, listening and talking, activities, interaction, program structure, and parents and provider. It is designed to assess programs serving children through school-age, up to age 12. FCCERS application allows for program self-assessment and improvement planning.

Family Child Care Providers (FCCPs)	People who care for four to 14 children (including their own), under the age of 12, in their own home. A person who provides Family Child Care in their home is required to apply for and obtain a license by meeting all the requirements set forth by IDCFS. Six or fewer children being cared for in a home constitute a Small Family Child Care Home, while 14 or fewer children being cared for in a family home constitute a Large Family Child Care Home.
Field Experience	Application of knowledge and analysis in a professional work setting.
Formal Assessment	The collection of data using standardized tests or procedures.
Formal Observation	Purposeful study of a viewed activity in a child care setting with specific objectives.
Framework	A guide for Gateways to Opportunity credential requirements at all levels including: general education requirements, specific education and training, work and practical experience, and professional contributions.
Gateways to Opportunity	The single statewide professional development support system designed to provide guidance, encouragement, and recognition to individuals and programs serving children, youth, and families.
Gateways to Opportunity Content Areas	Consists of seven foundational areas and their related indicators, identified by the Professional Development Advisory Council (PDAC), that identify professional competencies, including: Human Growth and Development; Health, Safety, and Well-Being; Observation and Assessment; Curriculum or Program Design; Interactions, Relationships, and Environments; Family and Community Relationships; and Personal and Profession Development.
Generalized Education	The amount of post high school formal education ranging from some credit hours to a degree (e.g., associate, bachelor, master, or doctorate).
Governance	Oversight and decisions by stakeholders (e.g., Board member representatives, parents, etc.) regarding an organization.
Grantswriting	Completing an application process by one party—often a nonprofit organization, educational institution, or business—to another party such as a governmental entity, corporation, foundation, or trust for a product, service, or fund.
Health Professional	A person with both specialized knowledge and recognized credentials, who helps in identifying, preventing, or treating illness and/or health related issues.
Healthful Environment	A climate that promotes positive physical, social, and emotional development.
Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (IDCFS)	The state agency that oversees child protection services, foster care, adoption, and day care licensing. For more information visit: www.state.il.us/dcfs/index.shtml .

Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	The state agency that is responsible for providing a wide variety of programs and services to Illinois residents including child care assistance, early intervention, home visiting, and other family support programs, and additionally administers the statewide CCR&R system. For more information visit: www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx .
Illinois Director Credential (IDC)	A voluntary credential awarded to early care and education/school-age care administrators (of programs with children ages birth through age 12), at multiple levels that identifies that competencies necessary for effective leadership and management of family- or center-based early care and education/school-age care programs.
Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA)	A statewide organization, which works in partnership with its member Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agencies to support child care practitioners, manage the statewide child care subsidy program, support families in locating child care and provide local and statewide professional development opportunities. INCCRRA administers Gateways to Opportunity and the Quality Counts: Quality Rating System, and is funded by public and private partnerships.
Inclusion	Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports.) (Refer to the DEC/NAEYC position statement at: www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/DEC_NAEYC_EC_updatedKS.pdf .)
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	A written statement developed, reviewed, and revised through a collaborative process that outlines (1) the child’s present academic and functional performance; (2) measurable annual goals; (3) how progress towards goals is being measured and attained; (4) an outline of research-based special education and related services and supports that will be provided to support the child in attaining outlined goals and access to educational opportunities; (5) the extent to which the child will not participate in the general education curriculum and activities, if applicable; (6) needed accommodations for the child to fully participate in assessment, or alternative assessment procedures, if applicable; and (7) the service delivery plan. (Refer to the DEC/NAEYC position statement at: www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/DEC_NAEYC_EC_updatedKS.pdf .)
Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP)	A record that documents and guides the early intervention process for children with developmental delays and disabilities and their families. It provides information about (1) family resources, priorities, and concerns; (2) overall goals; (3) services required to support goal attainment; (4) where services will be provided; (5) the timeline for implementation and evaluation of services; and (6) the transition plan for the individual child. (Refer to the DEC/NAEYC position statement at: www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/DEC_NAEYC_EC_updatedKS.pdf .)
Infant Toddler Credential (ITC)	A voluntary credential awarded at multiple levels that identifies what individuals working directly with young children 0 to age 3 should know and be able to demonstrate at various levels of training, education, and experience. A prerequisite is an ECE Credential.

Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R)	A research-based 39-item scale that is used to measure and improve the global quality of infant/toddler classrooms in seven subscale areas of care-giving practice. It is designed for use in classrooms for groups of children, 6 weeks through age 2.
Informal Assessment	Non-standardized appraisal, including casual observance.
Informal Observation	Unstructured, casual observance.
Integrated Curriculum	An approach to learning that emphasizes the relationship between subject areas.
Interpersonal Relationships	An association between two or more people.
Learning Outcomes	Statements that specify what students should know or be able to demonstrate as a result of a learning activity.
Learning Styles	Various ways of learning.
Legislative Hearing	A function of legislative committees (state and federal), held whenever a lawmaking body is contemplating a change in law, during which advocates and opponents air their views.
Legislative Process	A series of steps that a legislative body takes to evaluate, amend, and vote on proposed legislation.
Linguistically Appropriate	Addresses the linguistics—the proper language translation—of a program/curriculum from English to another language, ensuring proper readability, word choice, syntax, and idiomatic variation within languages.
National Afterschool Association (NAA)	A membership organization of professionals working with school-age children and youth, dedicated to their development, education, and care during their out-of-school hours.
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)	A membership organization/accreditation body dedicated to improving the well-being of all young children, with particular focus on the quality of education and developmentally appropriate practice for children from birth through age 8.
Observation	An objective review and analysis including reflection.
Organizational Climate	Collective perceptions (shared beliefs) about the people, processes, and structures of organizations. In the context of early care and education, it is the staff’s global perception of the function of the center.

Personality Typologies	Refers to the psychological classification of different types of people, and explains a person's behavior.
Phased Orientation	A gradual process to support a new employee and effectively transition them into a program and assume the responsibilities of their position.
Practical Work Experience	Documented work experience (<i>see definition</i>) in a paid setting where the employee is able to interact with children, youth, and/or their families.
Practicum	A college course, often in a specialized field of study, that is designed to give students supervised practical application of previously studied theories.
Practitioner	An individual who works directly with children, youth, and families in a program setting (e.g., center- or school-based home, etc.).
Presentations/ Training	Formal instruction given to adult learners on topics related to early care and education, school-age, and/or youth development.
Primary Caregivers	In Infant/Toddler care, a person assigned to provide consistent regular care, and to develop deep relationships with the child and their family.
Professional Code of Ethics (NAEYC)	Offers guidelines for responsible behavior and sets forth a common basis for resolving the principal ethical dilemmas encountered in early childhood education including ethical responsibilities to (1) children, (2) families, (3) colleagues, and (4) community and society. For more information visit: http://faculty.weber.edu/tlday/2610/code05.pdf .
Professional Contributions	An activity in six defined categories that goes beyond a practitioner's position or job duties as related to children, youth, and families: (1) Program Improvement; (2) Service in a Professional Organization (for the IDC only); (3) Presentations/Trainings; (4) Advocacy; (5) Writing and Publication; and (6) Research/Grants Writing.
Professional Development	Participating in a planned experience, such as a course, workshop, conference, etc., designed to increase the skills and knowledge in practice related to children, youth, and families.
Professional Development Advisor (PDA)	An advisor, trained through Gateways to Opportunity, who provides guidance and resources about career options, educational opportunities, and financial support available to early care and education and school-age care practitioners.
Professional Development Advisory Council (PDAC)	A statewide council of practitioners, state agency representatives, teacher educators, and advocates, created by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Bureau of Child Care and Development, that first developed and now oversees the development of Gateways to Opportunity. For more information visit: www.ilgateways.com/en/pdac-overview .

Professional Development Counselor	INCCRRA staff working within the Gateways to Opportunity credential program, who review credential applicants' submitted materials. Throughout the credential process, Professional Development Counselors help practitioners find trainings and coursework to meet credential requirements, and inform practitioners when they qualify for a credential.
Professional Development Funds (PDFs)	Money distributed by Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agencies, to qualifying participants, which may be applied towards costs associated with conferences or workshops and fees associated with approved credentialing processes.
Professional Organization	An entity seeking to further a particular profession, the individuals engaged in that profession, and the public interest, and is entrusted with maintaining oversight of the legitimate practice of the occupation and interest of the profession.
Program Administration Scale (PAS)	A research-based 25-item assessment scale that measures and improves the quality of center-based administrative practices in ten subscale areas. PAS is used for program self-assessment and improvement planning.
Program Improvement	A plan to enhance quality that is based on information gained from a valid and reliable tool (e.g., PAS, BAS, ECERS-R, ITERS-R, FCCERS, CLASS, or SACERS).
Point	A point is equivalent to one semester hour of college credit.
Reflective Practitioner	One who uses self-awareness, observation, and analysis to improve their practice.
Reflective Supervision	Dialogue between supervisor and staff that incorporates observation and feedback to improve practice, plan effectively, and foster professional development.
Registry	A central tracking system that lists professional development opportunities and maintains records of practitioners' professional attainments.
Requests for Proposals (RFPs)	The early stage of the application process that elicits bids for a product, service, or funds.
Research	A systematic investigation to establish facts or enhance knowledge and understanding.
Research-Based Developmental Screening Tools	Tools that have been demonstrated to be reliable, valid, and accurate; rigorously peer-reviewed, including publication in a refereed professional journal; and have demonstrated to work well with children from a wide range of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds.
Risk Management	Following preventive policies and procedures that reduce the risk of liability.
Salary Scale	A document that explains the criteria for employee compensation.
School-Age and Youth Development (SAYD) Credential	A voluntary credential currently in development by a committee of professionals from across Illinois that identifies what individuals working directly with school-age children and youth, ages 5 through 21, should know and be able to demonstrate at various levels of training, education, and experience.
School-Age	A research-based 49-item scale that measures the global quality of school-age

Environmental Rating Scale (SACERS) classrooms in seven subscale areas of care-giving practice. It is designed for use in classrooms for groups of children, 5 to age 12.

Service in a Professional Organization Completing voluntary work for an organization (e.g., serving on a board or committee, or helping plan an event) that promotes early care and education. (See specific credential requirements for more information.)

Social Networking Using online systems (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.) to build communities of people who share interests and/or activities.

Social Systems Groups of people and/or organizations that are interrelated and affect family functioning and child development (see Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory).

Special Needs Individuals with varying abilities (e.g., cognitive, physical, speech, or emotional) that require an individualized care plan and supportive services to families and caregivers to overcome challenges and to maximize benefits.

Specialized Education Credit hours and/or a degree in a specific area (e.g., ECE, infant/toddler, school-age, etc.).

Stakeholder A person, group, organization, or system involved in, or affected by, a course of action, policy change, or program emphasis.

Strategic Plan A process to determine an organization's future course.

Student Teaching A supervised classroom experience as determined by certification requirements.

Supervised Experience Working with children in a setting with guidance and direction from an instructor or an ECE contact at the site, who also provide an evaluation of their work.

Thesis A culminating experience written and submitted for a university degree.

Tools of Inquiry Processes and mechanisms used to support multiple aspects of learning and development.

Transferable Credits that meet requirements from one higher education institution to another as defined by institutional agreement.

Writing & Publication Substantial written work to be used by other professionals (e.g., newspaper, pamphlet, newsletters, handbooks, etc.).